The People in the Pupil

Why Mardomkavi Retains the Psyche It Removes

A lexical note on mardom, gaze, and the extended psyche

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I call him the mardom of my eye, for I have always found his place within the eye.

— ʿAṭṭār

The word is already an apparatus

Mardom is not merely the object of *Mardomkavi*. It is its first optical apparatus.

This note continues the projective argument developed in my Persian essay "روان به کجا افکنده می‌شود؟" ["Where Is the Psyche Cast?"], written in response to Don Kunze's video *Dilation and Cathesis: A Perspective Approach to the (Lacanian) Induction Puzzle*. The video and the Persian essay supply the larger geometry of projection, eye, and gaze; the argument below is designed to remain intelligible without presupposing either.

I coined Mardomkavi (مردم‌کاوی) by cutting and joining two established Persian names: mardom-shenāsi (مردم‌شناسی), anthropology or ethnology, and ravān-kāvi (روان‌کاوی), psychoanalysis. The new word is therefore not a smooth addition of two disciplines. It is made by subtraction. From *mardom-shenāsi* it retains *mardom*, "human," "person," or "people." From *ravān-kāvi* it retains *kāvi*, the work of probing, searching, and digging. *Shenāsi*, knowledge or recognition, disappears; *ravān*, psyche, disappears as well.

What kind of field begins by removing both "knowledge" and "psyche" from the names that generated it?

The answer is not that Mardomkavi has abandoned either. Their removal changes their status. Knowledge no longer stands outside its object as a completed view of "a people." Psyche no longer names an interior substance stored inside an individual. What remains is an operation: *mardom* is probed, but the probing also opens the position from which *mardom* sees and is seen.

The ordinary translation "people-analysis" is therefore useful but insufficient. In modern Persian, *mardom* usually names people as a collective. In older usage it can also name a human being or person. The *Dehkhoda Dictionary* begins its entry with "human being, human, person," then records

collective senses such as people, inhabitants, and community. Much later in the same entry, however, it gives another meaning: mardom-e chashm (مردمِ چشم), mardom-e dideh (مردمِ دیده), and mardomak-e chashm (مردمکِ چشم): the pupil of the eye. It also supplies the Arabic expression insān al-ʿayn (إنسان العين), literally "the human of the eye." The crucial point is that Dehkhoda does not reserve this optical meaning for the diminutive *mardomak*. It records *mardom* itself as the person or pupil within the eye.

The dictionary establishes a polysemy; it does not establish a theory. It does not prove that society is an eye, that the eye is a society, or that all these meanings descend from one recoverable origin. The theoretical question begins afterward: what can a language do when one signifier moves among a person, a people, and the pupil through which a field becomes visible?

A compound made by subtraction

The construction of the word can be displayed without treating it as a linguistic equation:

mardom-shenāsi → *mardom*
ravān-kāvi → *kāvi*
mardom + *kāvi* → *Mardomkavi*

The cut is more important than the seam. Mardomkavi does not simply place anthropology beside psychoanalysis. It removes the explicit guarantees of both disciplines: *shenāsi* no longer promises that a collective can be known from outside, and *ravān* no longer promises a psychic object waiting inside the person to be excavated.

Yet *kāvi* retains the motor memory of psychoanalysis. It comes from kāvidan (کاویدن): to search, examine, dig, pierce, or make an opening. Dehkhoda records both intellectual and material uses—investigation and excavation. This ambiguity matters. Analysis is not only a gaze cast upon an object; it is an intervention that cuts a passage into the field. In the terms of my related manuscript *The Signifier as Aperture*, the analyst is not a spectator placed safely outside the chamber. The analyst functions as an aperture through which relations become projectable.

The absent *ravān* is thus not restored as a hidden noun. It survives as a mode of operation. One may mark its place conceptually as a zero between the two surviving elements: *mardom–Ø–kāvi*. This zero is not an additional morpheme and should not be mistaken for a claim in historical linguistics. It marks the position from which psyche has been removed as a substance and returned as a relation.

This is close to dream-work. A missing element need not cease to act. It may survive through displacement, condensation, or the organization of the scene around its absence. *Ravān* disappears from the visible body of *Mardomkavi*, but the new word remains psychically organized. It does not contain the concept of psyche as a dictionary definition. It carries a psychic operation.

Moreover, the Freud's examples [on condensation] in his *"Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious"* (*Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*) are all about the words. For example in a sentence by which a normal person boasted that R. (Baron Rothschild) has treated him as an equal person: "*R. behandelte mich ganz wie seinesgleichen, ganz famillionär*" (GW: 423). Freud's graphical demonstration of this joke is very instructive (GW: 424):

Famili är
Milionär
Fa**mili**on**är**

We see how some letters are bolded or densed in the writing of Freud on this witty sentence. It is because of the direct superpositioning of two first thought objects and the effect of that *"amalgamating force"* (*zusammendrängende Kraft*) (ibid.) that pushed them into one 'object-of-thought'[136]. Considerations of this kind opens the door to a kind of deconstructive discussion. From this perspective, Freud's *zusammendrängende Kraft*[137] that produces a *Familionär* out of *Familiär- Milionär*

4. Upon another occasion I (Freud) had a dream which consisted of two separate parts. The first was the vividly remembered word Autodidasker: the second was a faithful reproduction in the dream- content of a short and harmless fancy which had been developed a few days earlier, and which was to the effect that I must tell Professor N, when I next saw him: "*The patient about whose condition I last consulted you is really suffering from a neurosis, just as you suspected.*" So not only must the newly- coined Autodidasker satisfy the requirement that it should contain or represent a compressed meaning, but this meaning must have a valid connection with my resolve- repeated from waking life- to give Professor N due credit for his diagnosis.
Now Autodidasker is easily separated into author (German, Autor), autodidact, and Lasker, with whom is associated the name Lasalle ..." (Freud, Interpretation of Dreams, chapter IV: 149ff.)

[136] This mental tecnique for compounding two unrelated words to *cast* them into one new word has a known name in Arabic: *naḥt*. The literal meaning of *naḥt* is very instructive: *sculpturing;* that is *chiseling* the word until it fits to its *cast* (*qālib* قالب) (read Stetkevych: 48-55).
[137] I want to lead shortly the attention of my reader to this word and also some other words that Freud has used in his descriptions on "this technique of the joke":

"*Den Vorgang, welcher den Gedanken in den Witz übergeführt hat, kann man in folgender Weise darstellen...: „R. behandelte mich ganz familiär, d.h. soweit ein Millionär es zustande*

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Figure 1. Freudian condensation in the formation of *Mardomkavi*. A page from the author's doctoral dissertation, p. 268, discussing Freud's construction of *famillionär* in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. In Freud's example, *familiär* and *Millionär* are compressed by a "condensing force" (*zusammendrängende Kraft*) into a single composite word. *Mardomkavi* is produced through a comparable condensation of *mardom-shenāsi* (anthropology) and *ravān-kāvi* (psychoanalysis): *shenāsi* and *ravān* disappear from the visible body of the name, while *mardom* joins *kāvi*. Yet *ravān*—the psyche—is not abolished. It survives not as a sound but as an operation within the word. Psychoanalysis is not named in *Mardomkavi*; it acts within it.

The optical meaning of *mardom* is also not an isolated Persian curiosity. Greek κόρη (*korē*) can mean both "maiden" and "pupil of the eye." Latin pupula or pupilla joins "little girl" or "little doll" to the pupil. Classical Arabic speaks of insān al-ʿayn, the human of the eye. Across these languages, the pupil is named as a miniature person.

The recurring scene is precise. When I come close to another eye, I see a small image of myself in its dark aperture. The "person in the eye" is therefore not simply the owner of that eye. It is also the other who appears within it. The pupil is relational before it is anatomical. It is the point at which seeing contains being seen.

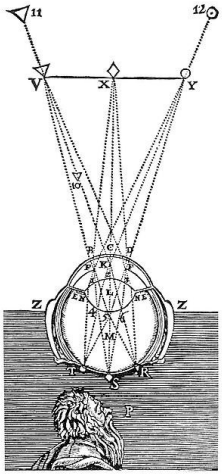

Figure 2. The Eye as a Dark Chamber. An observer views the image formed on the back of a dissected eye. René Descartes, *La Dioptrique*, Fifth Discourse, 1637. The engraving does not itself propose a homunculus theory, but makes its problem visible: if seeing an image requires another observer, seeing by that observer would require yet another, producing an infinite regress.

Persian gives this scene an additional turn because *mardom* also names the collective. A single word can contract into the tiny figure in an eye and dilate into a plurality of people. It moves between a local point and a social field. The word does not explain this movement, but it preserves it.

This is why ʿAṭṭār's line is more than ornament. "I call him the *mardom* of my eye, for I have always found his place within the eye." The beloved is not merely looked at. He occupies the place from which the eye itself is organized. He is both the person seen and the miniature person lodged in the seeing organ. **The line folds lover, beloved, eye, and image into one lexical chamber.**

The same fold clarifies the relation between *mardom* and the Arabic-Persian word ʿayn (عین) discussed in my Persian essay *Ravān be kojā afkandeh mi-shavad?—Where Is the Psyche Cast?* There, *ʿayn* was read across its senses of eye, the thing itself, essence, visible presence, and objectivity (*ʿeyniyyat*, عینیت). *Mardom* adds a figure inside this eye. If *ʿayn* is the hinge between the optical and the ontological, *mardom* is the human image that occupies the hinge.

This is also where the eye splits from the gaze. The eye appears to be the point from which I see. The gaze names the return by which I discover that I have already been placed in the visible field. In the pupil of another, I encounter myself as an image that I did not produce from my own point of view. The small person in the eye is therefore a lexical model of Lacan's proposition:

> Je ne vois que d'un point, mais dans mon existence je suis regardé de partout.
> I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from everywhere.

Freud's note of 22 August 1938 should also be read in full. Before writing, "Psyche is extended; knows nothing of it" (*Psyche ist ausgedehnt, weiß nichts davon*), he proposes that spatiality may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. Space may therefore be one of the psyche's images rather than a ready-made container in which psyche is placed.

The polysemy of *mardom* is not evidence for Freud's thesis. A semantic field and a psychical apparatus are not the same thing. The word does, however, offer a small linguistic model of the problem. *Mardom* is extended across person, collective, pupil, and humane personhood, while an ordinary use of the word need not gather these senses into a single conscious representation. The

relation persists without becoming a concept for the speaker. The word carries more structure than any one local use displays.

Here Don Kunze's distinction between dilation and cathesis becomes useful. In his video *Dilation and Cathesis: A Perspective Approach to the (Lacanian) Induction Puzzle*, dilation opens and expands the visual field; cathesis establishes a position, an upright, or a hinge within it. *Mardom* performs a comparable movement at the level of language. As "people," it dilates from the singular human toward a collective field. As "pupil," it contracts toward the local aperture from which a field is organized. The two senses are not geometrical proof of Kunze's model. They form a linguistic hinge that can be tested against it.

The psyche concealed in *Mardomkavi* as a word belongs to this hinge. It is neither located only in the individual nor dissolved into an anonymous collective. It is the non-coincidence between a point of seeing and the field in which that point becomes visible. Psyche survives the deletion of *ravān* because it has ceased to be an object in the compound. It has become the extension, reversal, and return that the compound performs.

The removal of *shenāsi* from *mardom-shenāsi* is also as consequential as the removal of *ravān* from *ravān-kāvi*. The usual name of anthropology promises a *shenāsi*: a knowledge of people. Mardomkavi suspends that promise. It begins from the fact that the investigator already stands in the field being investigated.

This does not abolish disciplined observation. It changes the geometry of observation. A culture is not a completed object waiting before a neutral eye. By choosing a word, drawing a boundary, recording a ritual, translating a joke, or naming a symptom, the investigator helps construct the field in which the object appears. At the same time, the materials look back. They place the investigator historically, linguistically, politically, and affectively.

My manuscript *The Gaze as Signifier*[1] proposes that being named and being seen are structurally related. *The Signifier as Aperture* develops the corresponding claim that a signifier is not merely a label attached to a ready-made object; it is an opening through which objects, meanings, and subjects become projectable. Mardomkavi draws the methodological consequence: fieldwork cannot be reduced to looking at people, because the word *mardom* has already placed a person inside the eye.

The observer is not outside the aperture. The observer is one of its effects.

What Mardomkavi studies

Mardomkavi is therefore neither psychoanalysis applied to a culture nor anthropology supplemented by a private depth behind public behavior. It does not individualize culture, and it does not turn

[1] For further development of the relation between the gaze and the signifier, see:

Iraj Esmaeilpour Ghoochani, "The Gaze as Signifier: Induction Puzzles and the Islamic Eye" (2025); "The Gaze as Signifier: From Pavlov's Bell to the Name-of-the-Father" (2025); and "Ethnotopology: The Gaze as Signifier and the Topology of Desire" (2025).

Related visual and topological elaborations appear in "The False Eye—The Sardine Can and the Face," "Schützenscheibe: Projection, Protection, and the Topology of the Signifier," and "Review: The Mirror of Dilation and Cathesis: From Flesh to Word" (all 2025).

people into diagnostic objects. Its field consists of the cuts at which narrative, body, law, image, architecture, ritual, and word begin to organize one another.

Accordingly, Mardomkavi studies not cultural objects as completed units but the transformations that produce them.

Its elementary materials may be small: a pun, a proper name, a slip, a child's game, a burial gesture, a domestic threshold, a political slogan, the shape of a letter, a dream, or a word whose forgotten senses remain active without being consciously recalled. Such materials are not illustrations of a theory brought from elsewhere. They are operators. They show how a culture localizes subjects, distributes visibility, constructs absence, and gives desire an external scene.

This is why I have elsewhere defined Mardomkavi as the study of the oneiric grammar of culture. "Oneiric" does not mean that every cultural form is a nocturnal dream. It means that culture, like dream-work, can preserve relations while disguising their production. A symbol may become more operative than what it symbolizes. A missing word may organize a compound. A people may inhabit an eye without knowing that the language has placed it there.

The Persian name itself is therefore not a detachable label for the method. It is its first case study. *Mardomkavi* performs what it proposes to study: a cut between two disciplines; the disappearance of two explicit terms; the persistence of their operations; and the construction of a new field around an absent center.

A working definition

The shortest definition is this:

Mardomkavi studies the apertures through which a people becomes visible to itself and, from within the same image, is looked back at.

A more formal definition would be:

Mardomkavi is an ethnopsychoanalytic and ethnotopological method for studying the oneiric grammar of culture: the transformations by which words, images, rituals, narratives, and built forms produce the positions called subject, object, inside, outside, individual, and collective.

The word has removed *ravān*, but it has not become psychically empty. It carries psyche not first as a concept but as an operation: the small human in the eye, the observer inside the chamber, the collective extended beyond any single point of view, and the gaze returning from the image. Perhaps it also carries a concept of psyche but only after we stop searching for psyche as a thing hidden behind the word.

Mardomkavi begins where the missing psyche starts to look back.

Companion texts and sources

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